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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4118
INFO RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 4823
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI 2118
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SENSITIVE
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SUBJECT: RAPE VICTIM PORTRAYED BY NY TIMES FACES CORRUPT POLICE AND POLITICIANS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Police in Khanewal district in south Punjab have refused to arrest the rapists and police whom New York Times subject Assiya Rafiq has accused of rape, women's rights activist Mukhtar Mai told Acting Principal Officer July 28. According to the July 26 article by Nicholas Kristof, two locals abducted Rafiq for approximately eight months, during which they repeatedly raped her. The locals handed her to the police, who detained and raped her for 14 days, until a local court ordered an investigation June 19 and released her. The Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization (MMWWO) has arranged shelter and legal representation for her and her family, MMWWO manager Samson Salamat detailed. FSNOFF contacted Khanewal district nazim Ahmad Yar Hiraj, who pledged to look into the case. A/PO related the case to Member of the Provincial Assembly Hamza Sharif, who recorded the details and promised to "fix" the situation. End Summary.

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Assiya Rafiq Abducted and Raped
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¶2. (SBU) Nicholas Kristof's July 26 New York Times article titled "Not A Victim, But a Hero" details the travails of 17-year-old Assiya Rafiq, who has accused four policemen and two well-connected locals in Kabirwala town in Khanewal district in south Punjab of abduction and rape. Interviewed while in the Mukhtar Mai Women's Welfare Organization (MMWWO) shelter in Muzaffargarh district, Rafiq told Kristof that two men abducted her, raped her repeatedly for nearly a year, and handed her in early June 2009 to the local police, who then raped her during a two-week detention. Although MMWWO-funded attorneys have filed charges against the accused, Kristof notes that police have refused to act while her family faces increasing threats. [Note: The Department provided a USD 65,000 grant for MMWWO shelter and resource center in 2009 and USD 130,000 in 2008. End Note.]

¶3. (SBU) In a July 28 meeting with Acting Principal Officer, Mukhtar Mai and MMWWO managers Samson Salamat and Naseem Lal stressed that the police have refused to apprehend the accused because of political pressure from former Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Raza Hayat Hiraj of the Hiraj clan, whose kin, Qaswar Hiraj, she has named as one of the two abductors. Kabirwala Civil Hospital had also refused to conduct a medical check, which prompted Rafiq to go to the District Headquarters Hospital, Salamat detailed. While Rafiq's First Information Report (FIR) languishes in the police station, the Hiraj family filed counter-charges against Rafiq's family, including her near-paralyzed father, Salamat noted. Salamat pointed out that the lodging of Rafiq's nine-person family in the shelter, the hiring of two lawyers, and the three-hour commutes to Kabirwala

has drained MMWWO's resources. [Note: Kristof advises readers to donate to MMWWO through Mercy Fund at www.mercycorps.org. End Note.]

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Nazim Hiraj Unaware of Case
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14. (SBU) In a telcon with FSNOFF, Khanewal district nazim Ahmad Yar Hiraj claimed that he did not know about the case. Told that Rafiq has named Qaswar Hiraj as one of the perpetrators, Ahmad Yar replied, "well, he's a criminal." However, he doubted that former Minister Raza Hayat Hiraj had pressured local authorities since, Ahmad Yar claimed, he has fallen ill for several months overseas. Ahmad Yar promised to look into the case and report back.

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Hamza Sharif Wants Justice Done
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15. (SBU) Informed by A/PO of Kristof's article, son of the Chief Minister and Member of the Provincial Assembly (MPA) Hamza Sharif wrote down the details of Rafiq's case during a July 28 meeting. He lamented that such breakdowns in law-and-order have occurred, and conveyed his father's pledge to correct the unequal treatment of women in Punjab. He bemoaned the immunity that police enjoyed, and said that he would follow up with the local authorities. "We must fix this situation," he asserted.

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Comment: Crime Shows Societal Breakdown in Khanewal

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16. (SBU) One of the south Punjab districts targeted by USAID, Khanewal has a legacy of abuse that has led to the rise of militancy in the region. The extreme poverty in Khanewal and the impunity enjoyed by local politicians and police have created a toxic combination. The development assistance planned for the district will have little impact if incidents such as Rafiq's continue to recur. In his report of the tragedy, Kristof editorializes that the U.S. has "stood aloof from the ubiquitous injustices in Pakistan," which has produced "cynicism" among the population about U.S. intentions. Reinforcement of the social and law enforcement structure that could prevent such horrible crimes from occurring, and quickly prosecuting injustice when it occurs, could help counter the rise of extremism and promote U.S. values as much as development assistance.
LOWE